

**JOINT EDUCATION, YOUTH & CULTURE AND SOCIAL & HEALTH CARE  
OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY SCRUITNY**

<b>Date of Meeting</b>	Thursday 29 <sup>th</sup> June 2023
<b>Report Subject</b>	Supporting looked after children
<b>Cabinet Member</b>	Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Social Services and Wellbeing
<b>Report Author</b>	Chief Officer (Social Services)
<b>Type of Report</b>	Operational

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Flintshire support an average of 250 looked after children at any one point in time. Our strategic and service focus bring together a continuum of services that include:

- targeted 'edge of care services' that seek to prevent children entering the care system where family resilience and parenting can be safely and appropriately enhanced
- focussed support for children who become looked after to promote and secure positive well-being, developmental and educational outcomes
- the development of in house residential care and expansion of fostering services so that we can offer looked after children high quality local placements
- reunification services to rebuild families to enable children to safely exit the care system
- the use of alternative court orders to enable children to be supported in arrangements that complement the care system
- care leaver services to support children as they move into adulthood

This report provides an overview of the core service provided for looked after children and the priorities for service development over the next 18-24 months.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

1	To review that range of services that are provided to support looked after children and the priorities for service development which centre on: i) implementing an App to support engagement and the voice of looked after children ii) refreshing our Corporate Parenting Strategy with an action plan for
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	<p>iii) service support and delivery across portfolios and developing a Charter for parents in and leaving care</p> <p>iv) producing proposals for the further expansion of inhouse residential care and fostering to support children locally</p>
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## **REPORT DETAILS**

<b>1.00</b>	<b>EXPLAINING THE SUPPORTING LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN</b>
1.01	The number of children supported through the looked after system changes as children enter and leave the care system. The average number of looked after children in Flintshire has remained constant over the last 3 years at an average of 252 children. This figure excludes children who are supported through national asylum schemes (currently 18 young people).
1.02	The number of looked after children in Flintshire follows an increase of 17.9% over a 5-year period compared to a Welsh average increase of 21%. Nationally, data tools have been developed to predict care rates. They take into account multiple factors. The most important is level of deprivation. Flintshire's predicted looked after care rates are lower than predicted, based on level of deprivation (circa 20% lower). This data aligns to a significant focus and development of services that support children and young people to be safely and appropriately supported through community-based support often referred to as 'edge of care' services.
1.03	<b>Edge of care services in Flintshire include:</b>
1.04	Adolescent Strategy Support where workers support families with teenagers through direct work, breaks, advice, support, and information.
1.05	Parenting Support including specific courses on parenting and guidance for staff on responding to behaviours
1.06	A range of Family Support Services that bring together services for parents with children at specific ages including Early Years Support and services for children aged 11+ through Y Teulu Cyfan
1.07	Respite support for families with disabled children including overnight support at Arosfa Care Home, direct payments to enable families to employ PA's or services that will support them.
1.08	Family Project work commissioned through Action for Children to provide therapeutic support to identified children and families
1.09	MST (Multi Systemic Therapy) providing intensive 24/7 support to parents for up to 20 weeks to enable them to effectively support their children.
1.10	Collectively these services provide bespoke and targeted services to build and sustain family resilience. 'Edge of care' is an integral part of our looked after service approach.

1.11	<b>Services for looked after children includes:</b>
1.12	Allocation of a social worker to support the child including regular visits to check how they are in their placement and reviews of how effective services are achieving the child's individual assessed outcomes.
1.13	Allocation of an IRO (Independent Reviewing officer) who works to defined timetable of ensuring that a child's plan is reviewed with the child and the relevant adults and agencies involved in their lives.
1.14	A Looked After lead practitioner in Flintshire CAMHS service providing a specific focus on supporting looked after children who need support through the local CAMHS service.
1.15	An active offer of an independent advocate should the child/young person want an independent person to support them in discussions about their care or to raise concerns / complaints. The service is provided by TGYP who are a specialist independent advocacy services for looked after children and they have a contract with the 6 local authorities in North Wales.
1.16	<b>Listening and hearing the voice of looked after children</b>
1.17	We have a well-established Participation Group for looked after children and care leavers, known as Young Voices Out Loud. The group meet regularly and identify areas for discussion about services, support, their experiences, aspirations as well as developmental activities to make the group fun! The Group provide regular feedback to Children's Services Forum on themes that are important to them which leads to focussed agenda items to review how effective the offer is to looked after children across Council portfolios as well as other agencies. The Group are also very active in providing responses to national consultations and have formed part of the interview process for senior appointments with Social Services.
1.18	We have recently secured grant funding that has enabled us to procure a bespoke App and web-based system for engaging with looked after children to enable us to set out their views at a time and in a format that is convenient to them. The App is called Mind of My Own and provides a platform to engage about individual issues as well as enabling to consult on specific topics with our looked after children. The App is visual, with simple pictures and child-friendly words, designed for children and young people to share experiences, feelings and views on topics that reflect important moments in their lives. It is a safe digital space where young people can be confident that their information is private and secure. The App can be found at this link: <a href="https://mindofmyown.org.uk/social-care/">https://mindofmyown.org.uk/social-care/</a>
1.19	<b>Corporate Parenting</b>
1.20	Corporate Parenting is the term used to describe the collective responsibility of the Council towards looked after children and care leavers. A Corporate Parenting Strategy was developed in 2018 and endorsed in January 2019. The Strategy reflected the areas of support that looked after children identified as important to them.

1.21	<p>➤ Home</p> <p>To provide looked after children with good quality, stable placements where they feel safe, value and cared for by excellent carers.</p>
1.22	<p>➤ Education and learning</p> <p>Looked after children will have the best possible educational outcomes and have opportunities to fulfil their potential.</p>
1.23	<p>➤ Health and well-being:</p> <p>To improve the health outcomes of looked after children in Flintshire and to provide them with appropriate health care and advice.</p>
1.24	<p>➤ Leisure</p> <p>Supporting and encouraging looked after children to enjoy a wide experience of leisure, cultural, sport and social activity to fulfil their potential.</p>
1.25	<p>➤ Employment Opportunities</p> <p>We will provide opportunities to help looked after children and care leavers develop the skills and experience to pursue employment.</p>
1.26	<p>In the Autumn of 2023, we will review the Corporate Parenting Strategy to assess impact and the next iteration of our commitments to looked after children. Some new themes that have already emerged from children are the importance of accessible and responsive mental health support (linked to the impact of the pandemic and feelings of isolation, anxiety and self-worth) as well as changing the terminology that professionals frequently use in their interactions with, and about, looked after children.</p>
1.27	<p><b>Care Leavers</b></p>
1.28	<p>There are specific categories of care leavers set in legislation aligned to the amount of time a child has spent in the care system. Broadly, a child who has been looked after for more than 13 weeks will be entitled to care leaver support between the ages of 18 -25. This support is predominately provided through Personal Advisors (PA)'s who support young people as they move through adulthood and the systems that young adults have to navigate including finding accommodation, further education/ training, employment, driving, and budgeting.</p>
1.29	<p>We currently have 190 eligible care leavers in Flintshire. Not all care leavers choose to engage in services and support and have developed independent lives. However, others require intensive and consistent support as they seek to adapt to adulthood and the rights and responsibilities this brings. We have a dedicated Team of PA's who support a high number of care leavers.</p>
1.30	<p>As corporate parents we are committed to supporting mothers and fathers who are in care, or in the process of leaving care. We have commenced work to explore a Welsh Charter that was developed with care-experienced parents and professionals. The Charter sets out a series of commitments to help care experienced people plan for being a parent, how we will support them when they become a parent and what we will do to challenge stigma and disadvantage. Our intention is to recommend that</p>

	we adopt this Charter once we have developed the infrastructure to ensure that we are able to deliver the pledge.
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<b>2.00</b>	<b>RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS/ CHALLENGES</b>
2.01	There is both a human and financial cost relating to the care system. Undoubtedly children become looked after because they need to be supported and, often, protected through this system. However, research has shown that the outcomes and life chances for looked after children have been unacceptable when compared to their peers. This is particularly stark when considering the financial investment that is often made in high-cost placements and specialist services. Flintshire Council's focus on realigning in house provision and support through local residential care, enhanced fostering and building our workforce will support both financial and quality investments over the medium/long term.
2.02	It is important that the narrative relating to the overall outcomes for look after children does overlook the many looked after children who grow into fulfilled, valued and successful adults. However, we cannot be complacent about our role as Corporate Parents to create a system that invests in local placements, provides good quality education and learning and builds the independent living skills and resilience of young people as they move to adulthood. This requires investment in the infrastructure that supports looked after children through a skilled workforce, continuous engagement, co-production with children, strong multi-agency working and a relentless focus on impact and outcomes. These elements will be taken forward through the 4 development priorities identified within this report.

<b>3.00</b>	<b>IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND RISK MANAGEMENT</b>
3.01	There is a strong focus from Welsh Government in securing a reversal of a national trend of increasing numbers of children entering the care system. A failure to ensure sustained investment and delivery in services that are effective in safely and appropriately reducing care numbers will lead to reputational risks for the authority and the missed opportunity for children to be supported within their family context.

<b>4.00</b>	<b>CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED/CARRIED OUT</b>
4.01	The 4 priorities for service development identified in this report: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. implementing an App to support engagement and the voice of looked after children</li> <li>2. refreshing our Corporate Parenting Strategy with an action plan for service support and delivery across portfolios and</li> <li>3. developing a Charter for parents in and leaving care</li> <li>4. producing proposals for the further expansion of inhouse residential care and fostering to support children locally.</li> </ol>

	Will all need to involve comprehensive engagement and consultation with looked after children and carer leavers to ensure that they are relevant, meaningful and focus on the outcomes that matter to young people.
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<b>5.00</b>	<b>APPENDICES</b>
5.01	None.

<b>6.00</b>	<b>LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS</b>
6.01	None.

<b>7.00</b>	<b>CONTACT OFFICER DETAILS</b>
7.01	Contact Officer: Craig Macleod – Senior Manager Children’s Telephone: 01352 701313 E-mail: <a href="mailto:craig.macleod@flintshire.gov.uk">craig.macleod@flintshire.gov.uk</a>

<b>8.00</b>	<b>GLOSSARY OF TERMS</b>
8.01	None.